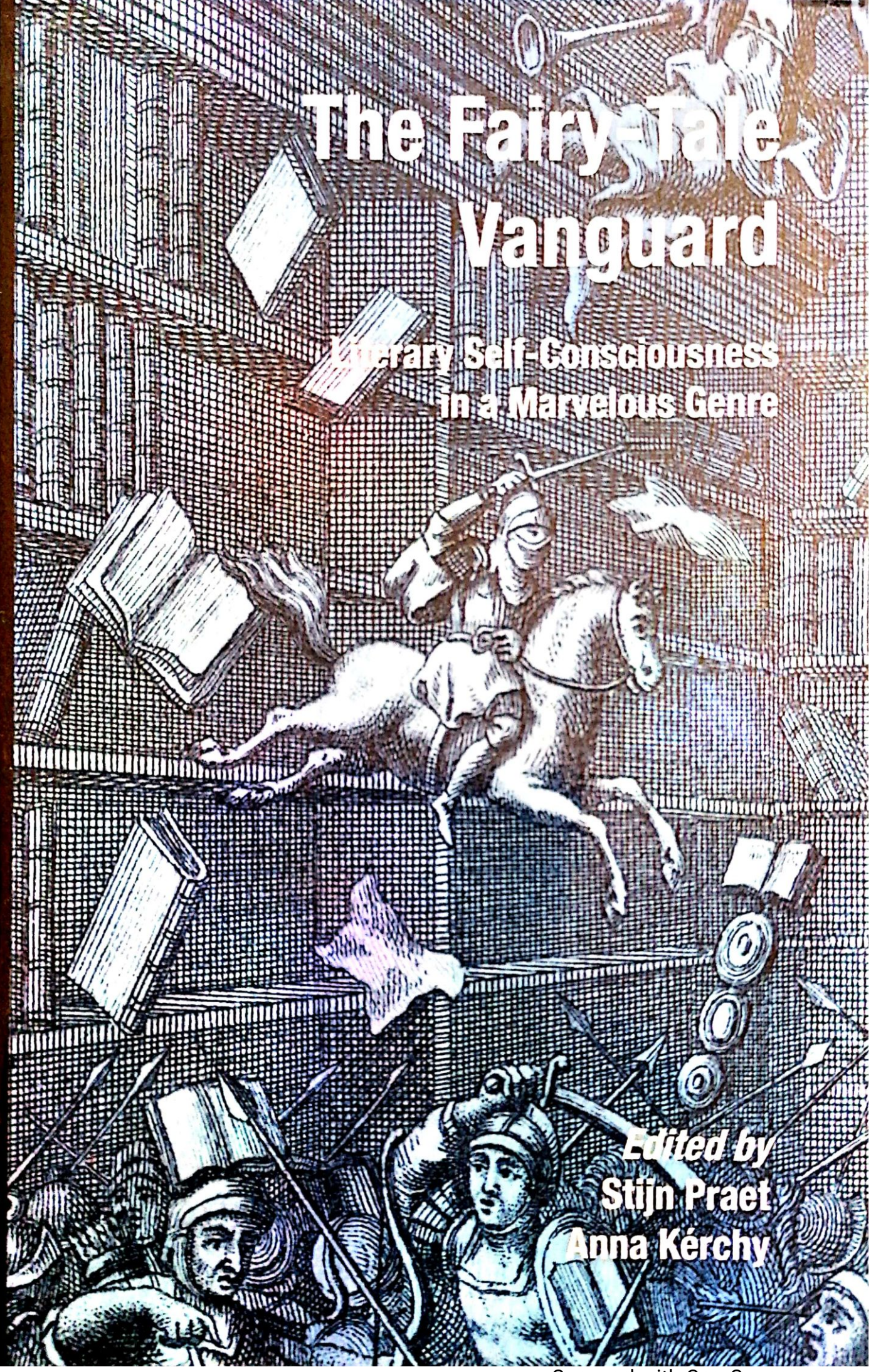
The Fairy-Tale Vanguard

Literary Self-Consciousness in a Marvelous Genre



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CHAPTER THREE

META-IMAGINATION IN LEWIS CARROLL'S LITERARY FAIRY-TALE FANTASIES ABOUT ALICE'S ADVENTURES

ANNA KÉRCHY

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, published by Charles Dodgson under the penname Lewis Carroll in 1865, followed by *Through the Looking-Glass* in 1872, constituted a veritable milestone on Victorian fantasists' "quest for a new fairy-tale form [that] stemmed from the psychological rejection and rebellion against the 'norms' of English society", since, as Jack Zipes adds, it "made one of the most radical statements on behalf of the fairy tale and the child's perspective" by liberating the genre from preexisting literary templates, moralizing didacticism, and the codified worldview of common-sense adult reality, while "encouraging young readers to think for themselves" (*Victorian Fairy* 73, xx-xxii). The nineteenth-century revival of the fairy-tale genre was meant just as much to entertain as to educate readers by questioning social injustices (induced by the industrial revolution and class hierarchy) while legitimizing the entitlement of all human beings to equal rights to the exercise of imagination endowed with humanitarian powers. My paper focuses on the Alice tales' multiply meta-layered fictionalization of complex cognitive capacities, such as thinking of oneself thinking and in particular imagining others imagining. I aim to explore how Carroll manages to represent fantasizing agency as an ontological necessity, a mode of empathic relationality to others, a self-healing therapeutic and problem-solving mechanism and, overall, a dynamic process conjoining make-belief and disbelief, psychic automatism and intellectual innovation, dream and logic, sentiment and wit, fancy and imagination, illusion and reality, solidarity and autonomy, childish and adult views. I argue that Carroll's Victorian literary fairy tales can be regarded as revolutionary, vanguardist forerunners to postmodernist metaperspectivism, which, curiously, seems to surface in

his writings in a manner more subversive of consensual sign systems and more empowering for creative mental games than in the case of related post–World War II fiction.

Disneyfied Wonderlands' Deceptive Delights: Postmodern Commodifications of Imagination

Patricia Waugh's (1980) and Linda Hutcheon's (1984) seminal theoretical works, most widely quoted on the topic, provided historically contextualized definitions of metafictionality. They interpreted the self-reflective questioning of consciousness, rationality, and reality as responses to the specific stimuli of late-twentieth century socio-cultural and epistemological changes. The programmatic challenge of Cartesian positivist assumptions concerning the speaking subject's mastery over transparent meanings, and ludic explorations of polysemic potentialities' political efficiency in destabilizing hegemonic regimes were diagnosed as par excellence symptoms of postmodern times. Metafictionality, described by its theoreticians as the inevitable by-product and master-trope of a *Zeitgeist*, proliferated in the era's mainstream popular cultural practice, too.

Media mogul Walt Disney strategically adopted metafictional pre-title sequences for many of its cinematic adaptations of classic tales for children: animated films like *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) or *Winnie the Pooh* (1977) featured in their first shots the opening up of a story book as a portal through which the fictional realm can be entered by invoking traditional analogue traces of the archaic act of storytelling. Elsewhere the young protagonist was portrayed reading a book identical with the literary source-text inspiring the visual adaptation:[1] in the Disney-sponsored 3D CGI live-action family adventure *Alice in Wonderland* (2011) the heroine recognizes herself as the knight meant to save the fabulous Underland kingdom while she is browsing through a prophetic parchment roll decorated by Victorian cartoonist John Tenniel's etching of the monstrous Jabberwock, the original illustration to the first edition of *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* (1871). Previously Disney's 1951 "all-cartoon musical wonderfilm" condensation of the Alice tales performs an intermedially complex metanarrative celebration of visuality

[1] This metafictional gesture also appears in more daring artistic takes on Alice-themes, like Terry Gilliam's poetic horror fantasy *Tideland* (2005) or Guillermo del Toro's historiographic metafictional *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006), as well picture books reinventing image-texts relations in subversive ways like Katalin Szegedi's collage illustrations to a 2007 Hungarian edition of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

when the title-character, an animated picture herself, fantasizes about making a "world of my own" in which every book would be nothing but pictures; thus locating in a moving image context the initial rhetorical question of Carroll's first novel: "And what is the use of a book, without pictures or conversation?" (11).

The most obvious goal of the Disney adaptations' appropriating metafictionality is to commodify fantasy while luring the reader-spectator into the fictional realm with the promise of an active involvement in its making. Throughout a typically twenty-first-century "transmedia storytelling experience" (Jenkins 2) widely exploited by the company, integral elements of a fantastic universe "get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels" for the purpose of expanding the fantastic story world through a variety of media and an ever-expanding range of tie-in products, all promising an uniquely immersive entertainment experience whereby you can enchant your every days with a plethora of "magic" merchandise from pop-up books and videogames to iPad apps, ringtones, and a dizzying array of fan merchandise. (see Kérchy *Transmedia Wonderland*) Disney's putting the Happily-Ever-After scenario on sale comes at the price of distorting the values integrated in the folk- and fairy tales' original archetypal structure. Traditional storytelling's subversive political critical edge and democratic quest for a communal harmony fade away as postmodern cultural industry propagates the ideological interests of capitalist, patriarchal, colonialist, consumer society (see Stephens and McCallum 160; Pilinovsky 17-33, Zipes, *Victorian Fairy* 25-26).

As Deborah Ross pointed out, the invitation to daydreaming, a trademark message of the Disney brand, has typically been subject to a rigorous discipline. The paradoxically simultaneous liberation and limitation of fantasizing "resolves into a connected and complex worldview that embraces difference and spontaneity" (Ross, "Escape" 54) and encourages metafictional reconsiderations of the imaginative experience per se. However, ambiguity "at its worst may produce confusion and anxiety" like in the case of Disney's recurring narrative pattern that stimulates female imagination only to punish it later on by guilt, and a compulsory return to realism and a reality that perpetuates thought systems of hegemonic masculine power regimes (see Ross, "Home by Tea", "Escape", Zipes, *Fairy Tale*).

This tendency, abundant in postmodern adaptations of the Alice tales, is illustrated by Disney's first animated Alice driven hysteric, terrified, or depressed by the "menacing gang of wonders"–talking flowers, the Mad Tea-Party's live tableware, or a broom-headed dog dusting away all paths in Tulgey Woods–brought to life by her own imagination and the Disney

studios' extensions of Carroll's nonsensical universe. In Ross' words, frequently reduced to a tiny, frustrated, forlorn figure lost in large, dark or chaotic frames, and accompanied by "self-lacerating musical laments", Alice "reaches the limits of her fear of imagination", "abandons her fantasy of power and excitement", "rejects all this nonsense, and is "anxious to get back home to write a book about it, since writing a story seems much safer than living one". Thus, her eventual creative authorship seems to be more of a compensatory neurotic activity than a celebratory agency: her quest is not fulfilled by her "awakening self-confidence" but is disrupted by her willful waking up (Ross "Home by Tea", 219) to a boring yet safe reality.

Even the animation-based *Alice in Wonderland*-ride in the Disneyland theme park at Anaheim, California includes a popular metafictional device: the entrance is decorated with a book page, and a sense of estrangement ensues when the moving carts, in between the Queen's Courtroom and the Mad Tea Party, suddenly exit the building in which the ride is housed and glide past people who are waiting in line there for the attraction. Whereas alienation in the traditional Beckettian sense aims to prevent the audience from passive submersion into fictional delights for the sake of heightening their critical self-awareness, this ride reinforces visitors' collective self-identity as consumers queuing for a pop-cultural fantasy product that requires "strict parental supervision of participating children". The ride ends with the dynamite candle explosion of the Unbirthday Cake that makes the vehicles "escape back" to the reality from whence it came.

As I have argued elsewhere (Kérchy, "Nonsensical", "Changing Media"), Disney's 2011 live-action film on Alice's adventures–in sharp contrast with the Carrollian calculated cacophony and director Tim Burton's dark and quirky authorial cinema–embraces a didactic, faux-moralizing *Bildung*-plotline that culminates in a simplistic finale celebrating a dubious post-feminist girl power in a strange combination with entrepreneurial, pro-capitalist, colonizing intent, and a touch of Oedipal desire. The heroine's metafictional recognition of the heroic place assigned to her in Underland's history is followed by her maturation into rationality and a refusal to submit to demands of the Victorian marriage market or the tempting but escapist Wonderland fantasies. Instead, she pragmatically decides to take up her father's business, sailing out to establish oceanic trade routes to China (a locus of exoticized wondrous otherness) and have financially motivated adventures with the trading company–scriptwriter Linda Woolverton's rather down-to-earth "metaphor for life" (Woolverton in Callaghan 20). Despite Alice's farewell

"futterwacken" jig, an homage to the anarchist Mad Hatter, she joins the ranks of domesticated post-feminist Disney princesses like Belle, Mulan, Rapunzel and Merida, who "fight for their dreams" while never ceasing to carefully respect the Disneyfied fairy tale's narrative conventions dictated by patriarchal family romance, heteronormativity, and a docile delimiting of women's rebellious tendencies.

As metafictionality is placed in the service of box-office success, entertainment purposes diminish the philosophical, political potentials of "baring the fictional and linguistic device" which constitute the imaginary textual universe.[2] Predictable, sanitized scenarios cheat with illusory, "narcissistic pleasures"[3] of creative co-authorship instead of arousing critical awareness about culturally constructed truths.

Metafictionality as a Generic Feature of Fairy Tales

It can be argued that the signs of metafictionality in Disney movies are most probably neither manifestations of the company's subversive intents nor automatic results of the productions' historical positioning. Rather, they are effectuated by the inherent traits of the fairy-tale genre on which these adaptations so willingly rely. Jessica Tiffin offers a rich catalogue of fairy tales' metafictional traits: she argues that the genre, by definition, self-consciously foregrounds its fictional constructedness,[4] ventures into intertextual dialogue with its own literary traditions, recycles highly recognizable plot structures, code-sets, and motifs, and stoically accepts its

[2] "Baring the device" was a self-reflexive metafictional strategy introduced by Viktor Šklovskij and widely used by the Russian Formalists as a contrast to the effect of verisimilitude: instead of reaching the beholders' forgetfulness about their encountering an artifact, the aim was to foreground art as a constructed simulacrum incommensurate with life itself.

[3] "Narcissistic narrative pleasures", in Linda Hutcheon's original sense, result from challenging canonical authorial privileges and reinterpreting reading as a co-operative experience (see Hutcheon).

[4] Although Waugh largely contributed to the canonization of metafictionality as a specifically postmodernist, ie. post-1960s literary technique, she also implies, somewhat paradoxically, that metafictionality is an ahistorically inherent characteristic of novelistic fiction. Others have traced the origins of metafictionality as far back as Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, Miguel Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, or Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Stijn Praet convincingly demonstrated that metafictionality is already a truly *common* feature of classical Greek and Roman literature–as well as of medieval literatures; and called one of the most defining traits of Latin literature its constant dialogues with and reflections on its own literary forerunners (see Praet).

own nature as fictive literary artefact organized by magical causality to avoid mimetic reproductions of reality or rational explanations to the fictional world ("Metafiction" 622). Elizabeth Wanning Harries associates metafictionality with a subversive strand of the fairy-tale tradition, a technique of late seventeenth-century French female aristocratic *conteuses*, writers who used elaborate Chinese box- or Russian doll-like narrative structures to tell a story within a story about storytelling (107). *Mise-en-abymes* were used to reflect on the textual universe's structured hence deconstructable nature and, consequently, the fantastic reality's relativity and potential unreliability. As Tiffin adds, literary fairy tales from the Victorian era onwards became even more emphatically characterized by deliberate frame breaks, irony, and explicit commentary, so that their proto-metafictional awareness spoke directly to the extreme self-consciousness of postmodern art and life. Elite literators–Atwood, Coover, Byatt, Carter, Rushdie, among others–gained inspiration from experimenting with the narrative structure of the fairy-tale form in their deconstructive retellings (see Benson), while the post-Tolkien mass-cultural setting has celebrated the fairy tale as a tool for expressing a communal experience (loss, quest, and potential compensation) and a collective desire for the marvelous (Tiffin, *Marvelous* 4).

My ensuing analysis of a favorite "pre-text" of contemporary metafictionally informed adaptations, Lewis Carroll's Victorian literary fairy tales about Alice's adventures, will focus on the author's vanguardist use of metafictionality, especially in its sophisticated manifestations as metafantasy and metaimagination. It aims to shed light on the limits and potentials of the postmodernist usage of narrative strategies designed to stimulate creative cognitive capacities.

Nina Demurova's study of folk- and fairy-tale influences on the Alice tales stresses Carroll's playful invocation of the genre's classic narrative structural conventions in order to challenge them. The heroine's sudden fall down the rabbit-hole recalls Propp's initial situation but lacks the misfortune, villainy or insufficiency that traditionally inaugurate the plot of the tale. The inconsequential episodic dream-like nature of her quest and the absence of a denouement break the conventional cause and effect pattern. Donor characters like the blue Caterpillar, the White Rabbit or the Cheshire Cat are unaware of their guiding functions or even hostile, and they test Alice without providing any real magical assistance that could help her progress. Spatial translocations lead nowhere in particular. Struggles are reduced to nonsensical verbal competitions (157-160).[5]

[5] Aside from folk- and fairy tales, Demurova mentions nursery rhymes, proverbs, and carnivalesque oral tradition including puppet show and *commedia dell'arte* as

I believe that Carroll's disorganization of the rigid codes of folk- and fairy-tale tradition can be easily interpreted as an ideology-critically invested metafictional gesture that constitutes a part of his systematic attack on potentially oppressive authoritarian regimes. It complements his mockery of the moralizing, didactic literature of his times which surfaces in the verse-parodies embedded in Alice's tales, as well as the political satirical argumentative layers of his rich text which articulate, in fictional terms, a clandestine criticism of Victorian political tyranny, classism, capitalism, racism, social protocol, moral hypocrisy, and educational systems alike.[6] Based on his recognition of what Cristina Bacchilega calls the wonder folktale and fairy tale's ideological paradox or "trick", "that magic which seeks to conceal the struggling interests which produce it", Carroll strives to undermine the tale genre's "normative function which capitalizes on the comforts of the consensus", while increasing its "subversive wonder which magnifies the powers of transformation" (Bacchilega 7).

Through challenging the traditional fairy-tale narrative pattern, Alice's fractured picaresque adventures in Wonderland and through the Looking Glass maximally fulfil the criteria of metafictionality. Conventionally predictable plotline and mimetic representation are rejected, reality is constantly questioned and turned suspicious, a dimension of self-reflectivity is displayed, and the fictional worlds flaunt their unstable foundations (see Waugh 5). As a result, Alice embodies the implied reader and the stories of her journeys provide "a metafictional account of any reader's encounter with any fictional world" (Nodelman 17). In Nodelman's words,

> Alice constantly questions the reality around her and demands explanations of themselves from the various creatures she meets who are also constantly demanding explanations of herself from her, and whenever she feels comfortable with the creatures to accept them as they are, she takes the opportunity to ask them questions about other things, to interrogate the explanations they offer, and to offer her own explanations. Readers are invited to view Wonderland from the viewpoint of Alice's inquisitive questioning of it, are prime to be in a mood that asks questions about the meanings of things and engenders explanations of them. (17)

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an other possible "treasure-house of national folklore Carroll's muse might have drawn upon" (161).

[6] See *The Victorian Web* for an excellent brief overview of the social, political criticism implied in the Alice books.
http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/carroll/societyov.html

Thus, the narrative structure of the Alice tales replicates the very interpretive activity that all fictional texts demand of their readers–and in Nodelman's view, fictional texts designed for children particularly do so intensively–when they stage how a character embodying the implied reader (the intended audience) attempts at "exploring a shadow text larger and more complex than the actual words of the text itself" (Nodelman 18).[7] It is Alice's inquisitive, active search for meaning, logic, and identity, and her capacity to fill in the knowledge that explains her formerly incomprehensible encounters and experiences within the larger context of the plot that she herself is interactively shaping, that truly invests the original Carrollian heroine with the imaginative agency of co-authorship.

Vanguardist Victorian Metafantasy

The Alice tales can be interpreted as a specific kind of metafiction, namely *metafantasies* which reflect on how the human mind makes sense (and nonsense) of fairy-tale fantasies modelled by the fictitious books within the Alice books. Most memorably, in the inverted world behind the Looking Glass, Alice comes across a poem about the heroic defeat over a mythical beast written in mirror writing that she first misinterprets as a strange pictography, regretting that she cannot read the non-figurative images replacing familiar linguistic signs. For Alice, the monster in the poem called Kcowrebbaj/Jabberwock, whom she never actually meets throughout her bizarre adventures, remains a "name without a thing", a signifier without a referent, a grotesque image-textual product that never gains a fleshly physical embodiment, and yet its overarching presence invades the fantastic diegetic universe. Accordingly, what fascinates Alice is not so much the vincibility of the unseen legendary predator, but the overall incomprehensibility of the nonsensical discourse about it. Her reaction to the embedded poem mirrors the readerly reaction to the fictional frame text in which she features as a protagonist: "'It seems very pretty,' […] 'but it's *rather* hard to understand!' […] 'Somehow it seems to fill my head with ideas–only I don't exactly know what they are!'" (156). What is at stake here is the manageability and enjoyability of the

[7] Nodelman explains the complexity and ambiguous reception of children's literature mainly on account of the fact that it is the only genre not exclusively written by and for its target readership; books made available to children are carefully filtered by the adult producers' interests and hopes about what children will read, and the adult customers' consumer choices are based on their ideas about what children *need* to read (4-5).

textual monstrosity of nonsensical representation testing the limits of imaginability.

Although no ultimate meaning is assigned to the Jabberwocky-poem, I believe that Alice still functions quite clearly as a clever reader, maturing into a creative artist on her own right, who manages to find her way in the wondrous land of (non)sense formation. Firstly, as a true bibliophile, right after her arrival at the other side of the mirror, she looks for something to read. Secondly, the idea hits her to hold the lyrics up to the glass and thus succeeds in "making the words go the right way again" (154). Thirdly, she can easily recite, word by word, the seemingly gibberish poetic text to Humpty Dumpty. Fourthly, she takes an active part in finding possible explanations for its semantic incongruities and while verbally jousting with the egg-man "makes thoughtful remarks" "surprised of her own ingenuity" (226). Finally, she light-heartedly leaves meanings unresolved, open-ended, polysemic, in both of her attempts at interpreting the Jabberwocky-poem: at the beginning when she gracefully floats out of the looking-glass house, curious of the adventures awaiting her, and later on, when she interrupts Humpty's despotic attempts at linguistic mastery, further challenging him by citing another undecodable poem by Tweedledee.

Alice's interpretive agility is not weakened by Carroll's parenthesized sarcastic asides–appended to her initial skimming through the Jabberwocky-poem–which augment the metafictional value of the novel through violating the narrative levels by directly addressing readers outside the text: "You see she didn't like to confess, even to herself, that she couldn't make it out at all" (156). I think that Carrollian metafantasy is considerably shaped here, albeit in an ironic re-appropriation of the former literary heritage, by the Romantic notion of "negative capability" John Keats (1899) famously defined as a receptive openness and flexibility to transcend one's own presuppositions, contextual constraints, and epistemological bounds, to accept uncertainties and mysteries without any irritable reaching for fact and reason, in order to transform a world full of doubt into art shaped by the assertion of one's poetic individuality. Alice instead of filling in knowledge gaps, rather accepts them as part of the fantasy world of her own making.

Just how much the Keatsian, nineteenth-century, Romantic idea of an epistemology of uncertainty resonates with postmillennial, postmodern theories like Judith Halberstam's "queer art of failure"–that reconceptualizes (the awareness about) getting lost, forgetting, or becoming unruly as potentially empowering antidisciplinary experience, fuelled by possibilities found in "the unexpected, the improvised and the surprising" (16)–sheds light on the timeless validity of metaperspectivism, and the nonsensically

liberating feel grounded in the recognition of the inevitability of misrecognition. Alice's dream about losing her identity, being mistaken for Mary Ann, Mabel, or a serpent among others might be an unconscious manifestation of the ego's thirst for a non-ego that allows for an imaginative identification with a series of other beings and things– throughout a stretching of the limits of fantasizing agency.

The Alice tales' metafantasies also contain *self-fictionalizations* whereby the narrator emphatically positions herself as a character engulfed by an imaginary realm and dubious about the factuality of the fictional universe she inhabits and should normally take for granted. This is illustrated by Alice's uncertain pondering "When I used to read fairy-tales, I fancied that kind of thing never happened, and now here I am in the middle of one!" (40) This line positions her as a character amidst her dreamlike adventures but also as a knowing reader of tales, aware of the conventional fictionality of the genre. Meanwhile, the metafictional implication of old forms encourages all readers to draw on their knowledge of traditional literary conventions.

With a sleight of hand, Alice distinguishes between *this story* she is partaking in and *other fairy stories* from which she has been able to safely distance herself in the past on accounts of their being clearly unreal, fabulous inventions, belonging to the Todorovian "pure marvelous" (1974) and inviting in metaphorical readings so as to deduce their moralizing, didactic contents. On the contrary, the Wonderland adventures she is metatexualizing about on the spot while she is being involved in them do have real stakes related to her lived experience of joy, astonishment, disillusion, anger, hunger, humiliation, and overall curiosity, and thus formulate a story that should be read *referentially* as "real". In fact, the clash of these readerly modes (referential and metaphorical) constitutes the very discursive engine of the nonsense fantasy genre itself.

Moreover, Alice continues her line of thought by paradoxically but affirmatively positioning herself extra-textually, too, as an aspiring author of the very narrative she is partaking in: "'There ought to be a book written about me, that there ought! And when I grow up, I'll write one–but I'm grown up now,' she added in a sorrowful tone; 'at least there's no room to grow up any more *here*'" (40). Due to a cunning play with time enhancing narrative ambiguity, the true account of queer things *past*, the tale of Wonderland we are actually reading *now,* is yet a story to come about in the *future*. It has not been written yet, it belongs to a book (The Book, the best book ever) Alice will have written by the time she grows up. We witness here a sophisticated, metafictionally-motivated intertextual

allusion to an imaginary character's fictional work that coincides with the novel we are reading.

The Dynamics of Imaginative Reluctance and Willingness

Regardless of whether we suspect behind the implied author Alice's prospective writing project a poetic inspiration to turn hesitation into a major impulse for art, or a therapeutic purpose to comprehend the incomprehensible, the text offers up *metaimaginative* dimensions, inviting readers to imagine the various workings of imaginative agency itself. In these cunningly structured tales, an adult narrator (voiced in the sentimental lyrical frames and sarcastic asides respectively cherishing and criticizing Alice's acts) is *fantasizing* about a child who *dreams* up imaginary realms where she can grow up (then shrink and grow again) or become Queen, also *playfully pretending* to be a knowledgeable adult, aware of the innocent ignorance of her infantile waking self. A complex interplay of imaginative reluctance and willingness is aroused by the multiple distinct imaginative agencies at work: that of the fictional girl-child fantasist, that of her adult author who conceives the Alice-figure as an embodied metaphor of an idealized version of his own imagination, and that of the reader/spectator who is puzzled, awed or intimidated by these intimate imaginary interactions.

The numerous cases of metaimagination or embedded imagination involved here, when readers are invited to imagine another person imagining something, shed light on the diversity of imaginative practices. *Daydreaming* helps Alice make it through boring days and it initiates her adventures. *Dreaming* occurs in the dream-frames of both tales, and most explicitly, in a final passage of *Looking Glass* where Alice wonders if her stay in Wonderland is perhaps a dream of the Red King, whom she had considered to be part of her dream. In a riddle-like soliloquy about who dreamed whom she invites the readers to make their own hypothesis concerning the functioning of imagination.

Enacting pretense play appears as a leitmotif of intra- and extra-textual realms, too. It evokes Charles Dodgson's play with the penname Lewis Carroll, but it certainly also relates to weird little Alice's favorite phrase "Let's pretend!" (18) that seamlessly leads her, as if by a self-imposed magic spell, to an adventurous other world from a safe domestic setting. Eventually, it turns out that even the story frame's safe domestic setting may not be that boring after all, for any bourgeois home can be invigorated by playing children who pretend to be, say, kings and queens, or hungry hyenas intent on eating their nanny. Such pretend play also organizes the

narrative logic of Wonderland. It is tinted with inconsequential aggression (of a *Tom and Jerry*-like quality), "has its own reality stipulated as the player chooses: nursery rhyme characters can come to life, words mean anything you want, memory can work backwards and forwards" (Lillard 102), and a mental framing is created resulting from the child's *imagining* things instead of actually really *believing* them to be so. Thus Alice does not actually *believe* that flamingos and hedgehogs are real cricket bats and balls, but she is ready to intensively *imagine* them as such. So an intensive immersion into imaginings is conjoined with a knowing awareness that things are not really so.

All this confirms that the Carrollian heroine's innocence should not be interpreted along the lines of an idealized ignorance, but, on the contrary, evokes a Sartrean existentialist notion of imagination as "the key to our sense of freedom" that empowers us "to conceive of possibilities in or beyond the actualities in which we are immersed" (Egan 30), to think of/for others. This ambiguous mindset is deemed by behavioral psychologists to be fundamental for the metaimaginative understanding of one's own dreams, anxieties and other's minds, too.

Speculating in terms of *'what if'-scenarios providing alternatives to lived reality*, or considering from a multifocal perspective others' understanding of taken-for-granted truths is a significant imaginative experience for Alice. During her picaresque journey, the little girl encounters various Wonderland creatures' distinct fantasy worlds, each constituting a different microcosm-like phantasmagoria, a private mythology, or a madness of its own. The White Rabbit's fear of being late, the Duchess' moralizing mania, the Red Queen's empty, tyrannical threats of beheading, the Mad Hatter's eternalized teatime, Humpty Dumpty's juggling with words–are all connected by her empathic figure, who tries to understand each of them by suspending her own culturally determined value judgments and embracing their mental microcosms' radically different logics (or illogics!) of functioning. She fantasizes with them while tolerantly accepting their variability, unpredictability, and irrationality.

Alice's epistemology is primarily marked by kaleidoscopic knowledge-formations and empathy with the vulnerability resulting from the insatiable desire to know the unknowable. She democratically and altruistically enters into play with all the creatures she encounters, willing to consider as a feasible possibility every single delusionary version of reality they present to her. Figuratively speaking, she is ready to join any Caucus Race, Lobster Quadrille or Queenly Crocket Game she is invited to, even if she is perfectly aware that all of these games' only rules are that there

are no rules. But running together is more important than arriving first–or arriving at all. Similarly, communal fantasizing is more rewarding than the clear-cut comprehension of ultimately finalized meanings. With that in mind, despite the presumably frustrating unpredictability of her adventures, Alice eventually attains a certain sense of ease. As the omniscient narrative voice puts it, "So many out of the way things had happened lately, that Alice had begun to think that very few things indeed were impossible" (10), she is "not much surprised, getting so well used to queer things happening" (68).

Besides its ethical potentials, imagination also gains an *evolutionary* (psychological) significance. This is certainly due to the influence of the Darwinian theory of Evolution that surfaces in Carroll's fantasy in episodes like the Caucus Race, a mock version of the species' competitive struggle for the survival of the fittest (see Lovell-Smith). Alice's "imaginativeness against all odds" allows her to reinterpret all Wonderlandish atrocities and frustrations in terms of curious, inconsequential adventures which leave her intact and amused. Her shrinking, growing, or falling never hurt; the creatures she encounters might seem rude, but they do no harm; the mad tea partiers' crazy remarks are never meant to be insulting; no one is beheaded despite the vehement royal commands, and the gryphon's tears are all just "his fancy" (100). This points towards an evolutionary psychological understanding of imaginativeness as mankind's innate crisis-managing capacity to adapt to the circumstances. Decisions are made through relying on mental simulations of potential future courses of events, or of others' thoughts and choices possibly affecting them. Fantasy's therapeutical powers may also help us reach the happiness that makes life bearable, even in the face of interpersonal crisis or collective trauma (Egan 178). Moreover, as wonder becomes the order of the day for Alice, even cognitive capacities such as simple perception, succeeding misinterpretation, and an awareness of others' multiple parallel interpretive failures, the knowledge about unknowability itself may provide, paradoxically, a sense of intellectual supremacy and emotional comfort. Imaginativeness associated with Alice's psychic resilience turns her into a true heroine in readers' eyes.

Partly due to the picaresque current in Carroll's tales–allowing for a journey into multiple fictitious minds–, instead of fully familiarizing herself with the elaborate phantasmagorias of Wonderland-inhabitants, Alice just gets a glimpse of the fleeting, incomplete fantasy-fragments of each. Therefor, her improvisational interpretive takes are closer to *metafancy* than metaimagination. Her location as a focalizer at the intersection of (or oscillating in-between) various different private

fantasizings results in her multifocal capacity to imaginatively consider many, often contradictory, viewpoints at the same time. While the White Queen can *believe* as many as six impossible things before breakfast and urges Alice too to do so, Alice's feat resides not so much in believing but in *imagining* several impossible fancies in a simultaneous manner, transcending sequentiality. Challenging the famous "duck/rabbit optical illusion" (variously attributed to the psychologist Jastrow, the philosopher Wittgenstein and the art historian Gombrich) (Briscoe 49), where the mind switches between seeing either one or the other side of a reversible figure, Alice can perceive both meanings of the ambiguous figure at once. Thus, she is able to bring into being a Wonderland governed by poetic figures, portmanteau words, oxymorons, and nonsense which blur semantic distinctions and confuse incompatible signifiers or create unimaginable ones. During Alice's fall the mental image of cats eating bats quickly slides into bats eating cats; while her imagining the "slighty toves" who are "something like badgers, something like lizards, and something like *corkscrews*" (226) is a genuine feat of kaleidoscopic fantasizing.

(Mis)remembering as a Strategic Use of Imaginative Spontaneity

As in nonsense discourse, the childish liberation and the adult control of imagination are singularly intertwined throughout Alice's epistemological endeavors to map Wonderland. Her concern with testing and regaining her true identity can be connected to the imaginative experience of (*mis)remembering.* With one of her typical speech-acts, she wants to see if she has remained herself or changed into someone else by attempting to recite didactic poems learnt at school. This is a gesture James Kincaid severely criticized as a sign of the "failed fantasy" of a "false child" deeply disciplined, and deformed by her bourgeois rationalization (95). However, it is important to note that instead of the moralizing, sentimental originals, only mock parodies come to Alice's lips unbidden, unthought-of of, in a nearly unconscious automatic manner, lapsus-like, or as if in a somniloquy, shedding light on the incalculable, irrational, rebellious side of cognitive agency.

Throughout Alice's misremembering, the rhymes which "come and grow by themselves"[8] all distorted are the ones that she, like all educated Victorian children, used *to know by heart*, i.e. by virtue of yet another

[8] This is an expression Carroll uses in 1886 to retrospectively comment on his way of composing the Alice tales. See later in this paper.

semi-conscious, affectively charged, instant thought-reproduction. Hence, the verses Alice enacts underline the elusiveness of the most fundamental foundation of meaning. They become nonsensical both for Victorians who are familiar with the original rhymes and thus recognize Carroll's poking fun of established children's literature of his time, and for contemporary readers who can revel in postmodern textual pleasures of unrestrained, referentless, or de-referentialized signification.

These poetic verifications of one's self-identity aim to resist the Wonderland creatures' misidentifying her as Mary Ann (the White Rabbit) or Mabel (the Caterpillar) or a serpent (the Pigeon) or a monster (the Unicorn), and coincide, on a metanarrative level, with the fictional girl character's revolt against the adult author and the readers who faultily envision her in a disabling manner, as a naïve, ignorant, passive victim of her circumstances. When, despite her invincible forgetfulness, Alice insists that the most distinctive feature of her individuality is her "knowing all sorts of things" (unlike her intra-textually summoned doppelgangers, like Mabel or Ada, who "know such a very little" (23)), she emerges not so much a failed imitator of canonized didactic verse but rather an adventurous initiator of linguistic creativity. She is a spur-of-the-moment inventor of new, extemporized, nonsensical rhymes, and a willing resonator of words which "do not come as they used to" (23), get altered (74), and even make her own voice sound strange (23).

Moreover, her impromptu verbal nonsense entices emotions endowed with a physical productivity that can revivify Wonderland: the tears she sheds in frustration for not remembering the original lyrics create a pool from which a "whole Wonderland menagerie" emerges (see Suchan 74), odd creatures with whom she swims along and plays the Caucus Race–in an episode even the harshest critics of the presumably all-too-rational Alice regard as a rare occasion for joyous forgetfulness. Alice can become an author of her own making, conforming neither to Victorian discipline nor Wonderland madness, but instead, gradually mastering her consistently self-doubting identity by means of a clever and/or compulsive reliance on the powers of childish fantasy and a paradoxically *strategic*, even metanarratively self-aware use of her imaginative *spontaneity*.

In her *Evolution and Imagination in Victorian Children's Literature* Jessica Straley argues that the alternately recited poems' deviation from the originals tie in with Alice's post-Darwinian negotiations of identity and species. They show that "change and continuity can coexist, that being the old Alice and the new Alice are both part of being Alice, and that species is a sliding category capable of both maintaining and accruing meaning" (101). Furthermore, the poem-parodies match Alice's manifold

morphological metamorphoses. They reveal the human vulnerability to scientific-, linguistic classification and perform a mock semiological education in a Carrollian fashion–deriding Victorian pedagogy's disciplinary commonplaces like rote memorization or final exams as well as Matthew Arnold's progressive praise of humanities' morally formative function–by celebrating human imaginative agency as an efficient instrument of "purposeful change" (101).

Alice's poem recital/reconstruction also illustrates how Carroll destabilized the hierarchical distinction between binary modes of make-believe introduced by the Romantics that has prevailed in Western metaimagination ever since. He attributes equal importance to the self-consciously calculated, messianically designed, creative artistic *imagination*, and the traditionally less appreciated, childishly whimsical, daydreamy, or hallucinatory, semi-conscious *fancy*.[9] Carroll's support of belittled fancy likely came from his fascination with the invisible realms explored by Victorian pseudo-sciences (clairvoyance, hypnotism, mesmerism, astrology) and the altered "trance-like" states of consciousness which presumably combined extreme mental excitement with meditative quiescence, and hence revealed for the "inner eye" things physically unavailable to sensory perception, allowing for a "mind-voyaging" whereby the person in apparent reverie, unconscious of actuality, could leave behind earthly toils and "migrate into fairyland" (see Warner 205-220). The story frames where Alice possibly dreams herself into being in Wonderland as a daring sojourner cast in a fantasy world can be regarded as examples for the "mind-voyaging" of an "armchair flâneur".

Words "Coming and Growing by Themselves" in Girlish Tongues and Ears

The Alice tales fictionalize the inherent inseparability and strategic entanglement of spontaneous fancy and strategic imagination, while problematizing the conventional cultural engendering of the two cognitive faculties: the infantilized, feminized nature of the former and the mature masculine priority of the latter feat. One of Carroll's most admirable merits, as Marah Gubar points out,[10] is that he expresses his indebtedness

[9] Stephen Prickett positions fancy at the origins of the fantasy fiction genre, as a counter-narrative to the established Romantic writerly tradition (6-9).

[10] Gubar's critical insights are based on "a keen awareness of the fact that children are always already involved with (and influenced by) adults" (Gubar 95), but I also wish to stress adults' tremendous indebtedness to this involvement that proves to be mutually influential, along the lines of an intimate reciprocity that has the

as an author to the "girlish tongues and ears" and shares the credit of artistic creative agency with his girl-child muses who earn a co-authorial status by virtue of a simple rhetorical gesture. He pays homage by using the first-person plural pronoun "we" when recalling the tale's genesis in *Wonderland*'s prefatory poem, the famous rowing expedition with the "merry crew" (Carroll 8) of the three Liddell sisters, all inspirationally involved in the "communal story-making" (Gubar 96). The novels' narrative flow is fundamentally determined by Alice's liberated loquaciousness, her vivid verbal intrusions and trademark "willingness to interact with the world around, chatting with every creature she encounters" (Gubar 96), no matter how odd they seem or sound. The discursive acts of Alice's sisters who, "flash forth [encouraging the storyteller] 'to begin it'", "interrupt the tale not more than once a minute", and urge that "there will be nonsense in it" (Carroll 7) also assist the birth of the story. Carroll seems to be handling the oars and the quill, but the little girls are dictating the direction. A "joyous cacophony" (Gubar 96) of many charming girl-child tongues underlies and undoes the adult male authorial voice's self-discipline. The Liddell girls' clever and curious, spontaneously uninhibited interventions shape plot, style, and influence the manner of creation of the nonsense fairy-tale fantasy "extemporized for their benefit" (Carroll 7).

Twenty-five years later, in his "Alice on the Stage" (1886) Carroll provides a metatextual commentary on his improvisatory storytelling ways in terms akin to fantasy's highly infantilized and feminized, inconsequential and capricious, instinctively mechanical mental operations fleeing all rational control or premediated artistic design. He recalls how while "inventing the tale as they went along" boating (Collingwood in Gardner 9), "fancies unsought came crowding thick upon him [the narrator]", at "times when the jaded Muse was goaded into action, and plodded meekly on, more because she had to say something than that she had something to say", having "sent [his] heroine straight down a rabbit-hole, to begin with, without the least idea what was to happen afterwards", drifting with these undifferentiated, unrecorded stream of tales that "lived and died, like summer midges, each in its own golden afternoon" (Carroll, "Alice Stage" 223-224). The emotional motivation behind the "extempore romance" (Collingwood in Gardner 9)–"to please the child I loved" (Carroll, "Alice Stage" 224)–is so powerful that the subsequent calculated imaginative composition in the meticulous rewritings of the initial oral version–marked by a list of tentative titles as *Alice's Adventures Under Ground, Alice's Golden Hours, Alice Among the Elves, Alice's Hour in Elf-land, Alice's*

capacity to unsettle illusorily fixed authoritarian and authorial power-positionalities.

Doings in Elf-Land, and finally *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*– preserves the features of phantasmagorical fancy described in depth in Carroll's reminiscence of his artistic production process.

> In writing it out, I added many fresh ideas, which seemed to grow of themselves upon the original stock; and many more added themselves when, years afterwards, I wrote it all over again for publication: but (this may interest some readers of 'Alice' to know) every such idea and nearly every word of the dialogue, *came of itself*. Sometimes an idea comes at night, when I have had to get up and strike a light to note it down– sometimes when out on a lonely winter walk, when I have had to 'stop, and with half-frozen fingers jot down a few words which should keep the new-born idea from perishing–but whenever or however it comes, it comes of itself. I cannot set invention going like a clock, by any voluntary winding up: nor do I believe that any original writing (and what other writing is worth preserving?) was ever so produced. If you sit down, unimpassioned and uninspired, and tell yourself to write for so many hours, you will merely produce (at least I am sure I should merely produce) some of that article which fills, so far as I can judge, two-thirds of most magazines– most easy to write most weary to read–men call it 'padding,' and it is to my mind one of the most detestable things in modern literature. 'Alice' and the 'Looking-Glass' are made up almost wholly of bits and scraps, single ideas which *came of themselves* (Carroll, "Alice on Stage" 224).

Although Carroll continues by referring to himself as a Poet who gave his readers the best he had to offer, his nearly monomaniac, compulsive, repetitive insistence on the tautological expressions of the words' "coming and growing by themselves", twice italicized for further emphasis, is quite conspicuous. This choice of terms circumscribes the image of an author who is ready to renounce the authority over his text, knowing that the components facilitating, fuelling his writing, the passion, the inspiration, and even the will for preservation, originate from the mental maneuvers of others, the memories of his child friends: namely Alice Liddell, his "little listener (who one day chanced to) petition that the tale might be written out for her"; fellow fantasist George MacDonald's daughter Mary, his little reader who encouraged further the publication of *Wonderland*; and little cousin Alice Raikes who gave him the idea for creating the "wrong-way-round" world of *Through the Looking Glass* with her cunning solution to Carroll's riddle on mirrors.[11] In my view, these Carrollian little

[11] Derek Hudson's biography of Carroll recounts the anecdote as follows: "The idea of going through the looking-glass into a mysterious country beyond seems to have derived, however, from a meeting between Dodgson and another Alice, his little cousin Alice Raikes. Dodgson gave her an orange and asked her in which

girls are more of initiative agents than passive foundations of the adult male author's "writerly text" (see Barthes). Thus, girlish tongues and ears– both carefree and caring ways of storytelling, listening, and fantasizing– constitute the most important features and metonymic kernel of Carroll's metafictionally aware fictional self-portrait as Alice. By celebrating children's imagination the Alice tales embrace fairy tale's primary agenda: they "might be built on dreams [yet cast] a spell that is not false: an invocation to protect those most endangered on this earth" (Bernheimer v).[12]

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hand she was holding it. When she said 'The right', he invited her to stand before a mirror and tell him in which hand the girl in the looking-glass held the orange. 'The left hand', came the puzzled reply. 'Exactly', agreed Dodgson, 'and how do you explain that?' 'If I was on the other side of the glass', said Alice Raikes, 'wouldn't the orange still be in my right hand?' 'Well done, little Alice', replied Dodgson, 'the best answer I've had yet'" (22).

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